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Are Media Setting Up Reagan on the Summit?

Mikhail Gorbachev, head of the "evil empire," is the new media hero. As the Geneva summit approaches, he has become the darling of the journalists. He excites the scribes in the same way Pete Rose exhilarates baseball fans. Bruce Springsteen's acclaim among teenagers pales in comparison.

An exaggeration? *Time* magazine, plugging its exclusive interview with the Kremlin boss last week, says Gorbachev is "well informed, urbane, witty, in total command and, above all, a man who knows his own mind." And that's just for openers. No accolade is too excessive.

He is, well, "simply marvelous," as Billy Crystal might put it. And so handsome. He's "well tanned," says *Time*, "ruddy in the cheek," and "conveys an image of robust health and naturally controlled energy." He's "solid," but "not fat." And "he laughs easily."

He also "dominates a meeting with three extraordinary tools: eyes, hands and voice." The voice "is extraordinary, deep but also quite soft. [Did some moon-struck maiden write this or *Time* editors?] Sometimes Gorbachev talks for several minutes in a near whisper, low and melodious. Then, without warning, his voice can cut across the room," but it is never "angry or bullying."

The new Soviet headmaster is really just a helluva guy. And, if you're not sold at this point, *Time* wants to impress upon you that he's a snappy dresser as well. He is, in fact "[r]esplendent in a well-tailored blue pinstripe suit, diagonally striped tie and gleaming white shirt..." And his wife? Well, notes Editor-in-Chief Henry Grunwald, "the Western press is in love with her."

Time's stunning description of Gorbachev, much of it filtered through the rest of the major media, has given a richer meaning to the word "bootlick." The interview itself was extraordinary, in that of the 11 questions asked of him—six written and five spoken—not a single one could be considered anything close to a hardball.

Typical of the questions tossed at the Soviet dictator: "The events of recent weeks, such as the U.S. announcement of the ASAT test and the spy dust charges, could hardly have been helpful in terms of preparations for the summit meeting. Is this type of thing seriously damaging?" How's that for a toughie?

Not one question about the continuing Soviet buildup, the cheating on the existing strategic arms tests, the murder of Maj. Nicholson, the ongoing horrors in Afghanistan, etc. Nothing that would embarrass the new Soviet superhero in the slightest. There was not a single query hinting that maybe the Reagan Administration has a right to be suspicious of Gorbachev, despite his scintillating personality. (Those senior *Time* editors responsible for this shameless pandering to Gorbachev, incidentally, are Henry A. Grunwald, editor in chief of Time Inc., and Ray Cave, *Time's* managing editor.)

Gorbachev may have dazzled *Time* and other newsmen, but he is still pressing the Soviet hard line. He accuses the U.S. of "militarizing" space, for instance, when in 1984, the Soviets conducted 100 space launches, of which 80 per cent were purely military in nature (the total number of U.S. space launches in 1984 was about 20).

In talking to senators in Moscow last week, Gorbachev grabbed headlines by suggesting he favored a radical missile-cut proposal. Unfortunately, the proposal has yet to be presented to our arms control negotiators in Geneva, and it was contingent upon our giving up even normal research on the

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Strategic Defense Initiative, although the Soviets have a huge SDI program of their own that nobody seems to talk about. Gorbachev also brushed over many subjects raised by the senators, such as Soviet involvement in Afghanistan and human rights violations.

You wouldn't know it from *Time*, of course, but there are experts on the Soviet Union who are wary of Gorbachev, who even think the media may be permitting him to set the world stage so that Ronald Reagan rather than Mikhail Gorbachev will be blamed if the summit proves disappointing.

Harvard Prof. Richard Pipes, who served in 1981 and 1982 as director of East European and Soviet Affairs at the National Security Council, is one of those Soviet experts who have been less than star-struck by the new Soviet boss.

He says he's not optimistic about the summit because, to the extent that a genuine accord can be reached, it must first "be very carefully prepared." And there is no evidence of such preparation, he told us. Nor is there any "evidence that the new Soviet leadership is willing to concede on any of the major issues: Afghanistan, or Central America, or Poland, or what have you."

Furthermore, he added, "There is a kind of slight re-Stalinization occurring in terms of repression of dissent." Gorbachev even mentioned Stalin in a favorable light recently, drawing "very vast applause from the audience."

He met with Polish leader Jaruzelski shortly after he took office, noted Pipes, "and immediately there was a crackdown in Poland." The shooting of the U.S. major in East Germany "was a very peculiar incident, not only the shooting of the man, but allowing him to bleed to death—this is very deliberate." Gorbachev, says Pipes, talks of economic reform, "but I don't see anything yet. He talks about eliminating drunkenness—very good, but this is not at the root of the trouble, which is centralization of decision-making and lack of incentives. He doesn't tackle that."

What sort of things would the Soviets do at the

summit if they were serious? After Stalin's death, said Pipes, the Soviets did take a few steps toward easing the Cold War. "They evacuated Austria, which was a step forward, they evacuated some areas of Finland they still occupied, and inside the country they released millions of prisoners."

So if they were serious today, "I would think that withdrawal from Afghanistan would be a very high priority. That really would be a token of good will. Secondly, the willingness on their part to dismantle the SS-20s [nuclear-tipped missiles massed against Europe], either totally or down to some acceptable level which would make it possible for us to reduce the number of Pershing IIs we are installing in Europe." But the chances of this coming about are virtually nil.

"I don't think there are any grounds to think he has any liberal sentiments," Donald Jameson, a retired CIA specialist in Soviet affairs, informed us earlier this year.

"It's important to bear in mind," Jameson told us, "that Gorbachev got into the party apparatus and began to attract notice in 1952, the last full year of Stalin's reign and when Stalin was engaged in organizing what was going to be the last great purge, whose first step looked like it was going to be the incarceration of virtually the entire Jewish population of the Soviet Union." Jameson said Gorbachev still seems to cling to Stalinist sentiments, and became more influential in later years as Stalin became somewhat rehabilitated.

Gorbachev "is no liberal," Prof. Pipes told us when Gorbachev assumed power earlier this year. "He's a tough hard-liner, and a protege of [late Kremlin ideologist Mikhail] Suslov—who was as tough as they come. He was associated with Andropov—that was the hard-line, reactionary wing of the party. These are the most obnoxious people in the Politburo, the most Stalinoid types, the most anti-reform, repressive and rigid" in both foreign and domestic policy.

This, then, is the *real* Mr. Gorbachev, the man behind the glitter, the Soviet dictator that the *Time* editors never discovered.